

MY HORSE JESSE



A SEQUEL TO

When Lincoln Kissed Me


BY

HENRY E. WING



SOUTH NORWALK, CONN.

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Introducing Jesse

I WAS sitting at army headquarters one morning, early in April, 1864, when Captain Cline, strolling by, passed me a sign. It was not a "high sign," not a wave of the arm, not even a motion of the hand, a nod of the head, or a wink of the eye. It was simply a furtive movement of the forefinger; but it was an unmistakable signal to me to follow him. This was because Captain Cline was discreet (a less discreet man could not have held his place as Chief of Scouts), and it was contrary to regulations for a scout to hold any intercourse with a civilian. I followed him to his camp, and he pointed to a horse—a bright chestnut gelding, just passed seven years old, with one white fetlock, and with a perfect star in his broad, bony face. He was without a scar or blemish, with a deep, full chest and a short, round barrel, with muscles of iron and sinews of steel. I had a sort of personal acquaintance with every best horse in that army; but here was a better one—if only he should prove to be as faultless in temper and training as he was in color and form. And such a creature he was to prove himself to be—high-spirited, quick-witted, patient, kind, brave, self-respecting.

Captain Cline led me to the hospital and directed me to a cot, by which sat a long-limbed, large-featured, handsome Confederate, with a bandage about his forearm. From him I learned that this paragon of equine perfection was a Kentucky thoroughbred, that he had never been in harness and that his name was Jesse. From this man—Jesse's late master—I also got the items by which, with other scraps of information picked up here and there, I was able to weave the following account of Jesse's *début* into our camp at Brandy Station.

The Scout's Trophy

From the winter headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, at the approach of spring, the intrepid and crafty Captain Cline, the chief of Meade's scouts, was sent South to spy out the land in view of future movements. He took for his companion and

guide one of his most trusty men, a Virginian, familiar with the country. They were clad in Confederate uniform; his companion, who was to lead the way, as a staff captain and himself as an orderly. In their quest they went as far as Richmond, where they spent two or three days gathering information. All this without other experiences than ordinarily attend this perilous pastime.

But returning they fell in with three Confederate cavalrymen, with whom they rode in friendly intercourse. Their route lay northwest, along the bank of a canal, for several miles, and then turned abruptly northward. They were riding two abreast: the staff captain (?) and a Confederate sergeant in front; Captain Cline and a Confederate private about twenty paces behind; and another private, Jesse's master, in the rear. They had ridden thus but a few minutes after turning toward the north when a tragedy was precipitated, the origin of which has never transpired. The scout, by some indiscretion, must have betrayed his identity. What is known is: that he shot the corporal; the Confederate at Cline's side instantly shot the scout; at the next tick of a watch Captain Cline had shot his file companion. Three men shot dead in three seconds! Then, for ten seconds, a desperate duel was fought between the survivors, with pistols till they were empty, and then, at close quarters, with sabers. At last, with a gash in his sword arm, the Confederate wheeled his horse and fled.

Does the reader realize what this is that I am trying to relate? Five men are riding in the friendliest fashion along a quiet country road; in less than twenty heart-beats three are lying dead and another, *hors-de-combat*, is flying for his life. And this is one only of tens of thousands of such "trivial" affairs, to pass unnoticed in the annals of the times—a sort of by-play in an obscure corner of the stage, on which was being enacted that spectacle of Civil War, before which the whole world stood astounded and appalled.

Captain Cline's safety depended now upon capturing that man before he could raise a hue and cry, and he rushed after him. He was mounted on a rangy Hambletonian, noted for his speed; but the steed in front, to his great surprise, steadily drew away from him. He was about to abandon the chase and hasten out of the neighborhood, when the Confederate, in taking the sharp turn as he struck the tow-path, tumbled off into the canal. The horse halted instantly, and Captain Cline captured both. Hiding out by day and picking his way cautiously by

night, through a strange country without a guide, it was nearly a week before he came with his prizes within our lines.

The Mount of the Cub Reporter

I was confident that the Tribune needed that horse for its "cub reporter," and, as they were not inclined to question our claims for equipment, I got him. I tried him out a few days afterward on a scouting expedition to Poney Mountain, on the upper waters of the Rapidan, from which we had a panoramic view of the Confederate army in its winter quarters about Orange Court-House. I was convinced, on this trip, that Jesse was the most splendid specimen of the equine species that I had ever handled. I think I have never yet seen his equal. What has anyone to say of a horse that would walk, without urging, six miles an hour; that would trot—the favorite gait of a cavalryman—fifty miles in five hours; and that once, without a sign of fatigue, traveled seventy-three miles before breakfast! (He had no breakfast until the next day.)

By the end of the month Jesse and I had become quite "chummy." It fairly seemed as though we had always known each other. A spirit of affectionate comradeship had grown up between us, in which each felt that he could trust the other to the last extremity. How little either one of us suspected to what tests this loyalty was to be put and how soon these intimacies were to terminate!

It was on the fifth day of May, after the first day's battle of the Wilderness, that we had our first real adventure. When I stepped to his head and looked into his bright face at daybreak, he told me, as plainly as he could speak it, that he was ready for any exploit, and that I could trust him with my life. An hour afterward, swimming the Rapidan at Culpeper Mines, we stepped into a hostile country, and I became instantly conscious of a change in his behavior—a steadying of his nerves for self-control, and a tension of his organs of sense, to interpret the slightest hint conveyed by voice, or hand, or heel of his master's will. It may have been a subtle response to my own spirit; but I am certain that he realized that our safety depended upon the utmost circumspection and mutual understanding. This was a new revelation of his character, as we had never before been together in critical situations. Not once, on that ride across country, by a false or tardy movement, did he put me in peril, and when at last I hid him away in the thicket above the

Rappahannock, I had an instinctive faith that, by no inadvertence—as of a whinny or a stamp of the hoof—would he betray himself.

Mr. Lincoln Intervenes

It is another story ("When Lincoln Kissed Me") my "advance" upon Washington, where I arrived some time after midnight. The next afternoon, in company with Mr. Wilkinson, who was in charge of the Tribune Bureau, I went up to the White House for an interview with the President. Mr. Lincoln, who had been made familiar with my experiences in getting through from the front, remarked that the Tribune "ought to do something handsome" for me, to which Mr. Wilkinson replied, facetiously, that they would give me that handsome horse. This opened up the subject, and I said that I was going back after him anyway, as I had promised him I would, and "I always kept my promises to dogs and horses." Mr. Lincoln immediately became interested in the project. A few questions to me disclosed the whole general situation: a Confederate cavalry camp, at Manassas Junction, six miles beyond our outpost, on the Bull Run River; a regiment of Federal infantry at the lower Cedar Creek, fifteen miles beyond; and my Jesse in a thicket, perhaps ten miles further down. Mr. Lincoln immediately decided that a relief expedition ought to be sent out to Cedar Creek, and suggested the use I might make of it by the story of a man who got his boy to coax him to take him to see the animals in a traveling menagerie, and then, himself, took a peep at the circus.

Early the next morning I joined the expedition at Alexandria. The force consisted of a light field battery and a troop of about eighty cavalry, entrained on a siding of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. The plan was to run that train, if possible without a halt, in utter disregard of threats or assaults of the enemy, into the Union camp near Warenton Junction.

Sidetracked in a Confederate Camp

The train traveled out through Fairfax and across the Bull Run without interruption, but creeping up the grade into Manassas Junction, the engineer saw a group in gray, standing at the station, and, just for a joke, pulled out a long, snarling, sputtering whistle. But instantly he signalled down brakes, reversed the engine and brought us to a sudden stop, right in the middle of the Confederate camp.

There is one person whom I have always wanted to meet and take by the hand: that quick-witted "Johnnie" who answered our discourteous, unlady-like greeting by throwing open the switch. He did not quite derail us, owing to the fact that we were on a rising grade and there was a man at every brake, but he put us in a pretty bad predicament. The horses were stowed, almost like sardines, in box-cars and the men were scattered through the train. We were at the mercy of the enemy, except that they were utterly unprepared to take advantage of the situation. They were dispersed through the little hamlet, with their accoutrements in their quarters and their horses picketed in a grove several yards away. Before they could rally and get into formation we had our horses out and our little "Napoleons" unlimbered. They charged upon us, but our battery alone gave us an advantage over them, and in ten minutes we had possession of the camp.

It was wisely decided not to entrain again here, but to leave a guard to protect the railroad from possible destruction and to feel and fight our way to our destination, the train to move cautiously along under our protection and as the engineer discovered the track to be clear. We were in a constant skirmish until we came in sight of the little stronghold on the banks of the Cedar. Here our pursuers drew away, and here we decided to send forward an envoy, lest our friends might mistake us for enemies in disguise (and it would have been a terrible catastrophe had one of those "Quaker guns" been discharged at us). So I left the ranks and, crossing the fields to the railroad track, advanced over the long trestle with a white handkerchief in my uplifted hand.

I cannot describe my reception here. It would almost be profanity to try; but it was characteristic of the most susceptible and impetuous race of humanity, with tears of joy in it, and gentle caresses and a soft murmur of affection. It seemed to me that it must be the day after tomorrow; but it was only mid-forenoon when we all came together within the stockade. I was determined to press right forward. I must go back over the exact route over which I had come out, as I had borne in my mind an identification of the spot where I entered the railroad's right of way and from which, by certain landmarks, I could find the particular copse in which my prize was hidden.

To facilitate my enterprise, a squad of cavalry was sent out on the highway, parallel to the railroad, to watch my progress,

o draw away any hostile parties from Jesse's retreat, and to open the road for our return to the camp.

Do you want to know about the meeting between Jesse and me? of the quick lifting of his head, as his ears caught the muffled foot-fall? of the sharp snap of his clean, white teeth into the strap that bound him to the spot? of the statue of a horse—silent, transfixed, with feet spread wide apart, for swift retreat or furious onslaught, peering through the thick foliage at the advancing figure? of the kiss of passionate joy that his master tossed him, when their eyes met in glad recognition, and of the affectionate whinny, suppressed to a gurgle in his throat, that trickled to my ear as I put my arms about his neck? Would you like me to elaborate this—to stage and lift the curtain upon these intimacies? I never will; neither of us ever will. Enough that then, better than ever before, we understood each other and trusted each other. In this secluded place, forty-eight hours ago, we had passed mutual pledges, and we had both been true to the plighted troth.

In the instant that he detected my approach, he had bitten his hitching strap so nearly in two that the slightest jerk released him. I put on his saddle and bridle, but I could not think of mounting a creature that had been two days without food or drink; so, with a friendly escort of a dozen mounted men, I walked by his side up to where the train awaited us. Here, after a hasty meal, Jesse and I took possession: as bunkmates, of a box car, in which, at late supper-time, we arrived in Washington.

Jesse at the White House

The next was probably the proudest day in Jesse's life. The representatives of the press in Washington—among them White-law Reid, at that time the correspondent of the Cincinnati Gazette—got up a purse, with which they purchased the handsomest saddle and bridle in the city; and, thus equipped, Jesse held a big reception on the White House grounds. The President, however ungainly he sometimes appeared on his feet, made a fine figure in the saddle; and he never looked more splendid than that day on my beautiful horse with his elegant trappings.

The following day I led him aboard a boat for Bell Plain, to rejoin the army at Spottsylvania. I should not have taken him out to the front. I was offered a thousand dollars for him;

but I should have sent him North. He was too valuable a creature to be put into such risks as were impending; but he was the only creature with which (whom ?) I preferred to share such risks.

A HORSE WITH AN ARMY RECORD

Meade and Sheridan Quarrel

I think it was the very day of my arrival at headquarters, that Meade and Sheridan had their quarrel. Meade was a gentleman of more than usual self-command; and Sheridan was generous, but proud-spirited and impetuous. Lee had beaten us to Spottsylvania; and Meade, disappointed and mortified, charged the blame, openly, upon Sheridan. Sheridan resented the accusation, in language more forcible than refined; and, in a few seconds, the conversation developed into a disgraceful, open brawl. General Meade, flushed and indignant, came to Grant with a report of the rupture. He declared, with a covert sneer at its absurdity, that Sheridan had bragged that, if he could be allowed to, he would "go out and whip Stuart." Grant promptly took advantage of that remark and replied: "Why not let him do it?" So the Lieutenant-General promptly issued his order, direct to Sheridan, to cut loose with his cavalry corps and hunt for and fight the Confederate chieftain.

Sheridan's Cavalry Corps—Plus Jesse

This was not to be a "raid"—which is really but a scouting expedition in force—not a simple incursion into the hostile country, but, perhaps for the first time in modern warfare, a great campaign of cavalry, unsupported by heavier and less mobile forces. Whatever resources Sheridan had at his command, such an enterprise could hardly be a spectacular success without my Jesse; so we went along.

That movement, in which, after sparring for position, two great hosts of mounted men, led by the two greatest cavalry commanders in the world, men in whose veins bounded the same red-hot fighting blood, fought for hours over the undulating plains north of Richmond, has been set into scores of pages of history. But that ever-changing panorama of color and form and picturesque combinations has never been and never will be spread upon any page or canvas. There were lacking the roar and crash and deafening din of an ordinary battle-royal. In their stead, above the clatter of hoofs, the clash of steel and the sputter of carbines, the sweet, tender notes

of scores of silver trumpets, floating under the vaulted sky, were weaving their tones in trembling chords and cadences, like a great organ, breathing through its flute-like pipes an inarticulate accompaniment to a solemn ceremonial and almost transforming the brutal, bloody scene into a sacrament.

Jesse was in his element. The spectacle was very confusing to me. There was a great deal of disorder and apparent independent and eccentric action, such as I was not accustomed to witness in the maneuvers of troops. There necessarily is with mounted men. There is hardly a more impressive sight than the orderly movements of trained men under fire—if they are bipeds; but put four legs under each one, and give some other creature the immediate control of those legs, and your veteran cannot be expected to execute his movements with much precision. I think I am not the only one who might confess that, under some circumstances, two legs are just about all that a man can manage; but mounted on the very best trained and tractable horse, his movements necessarily depend upon the spirit and temper, the gait and “action” of the creature under him. Besides, all these maneuvers were guided by signals of the bugle, with only two or three of which I was familiar, while Jesse’s quick ear caught every one, and he was able to anticipate the changes in the shifting scene.

Night found us, victorious and exultant, actually within the defenses of the Confederate capital. To the enemy the most disheartening event had been the loss of their incomparable chief of cavalry Stuart. From here Sheridan was sending couriers with reports to Grant, at Spottsylvania, while he was to push his column around the city to a predetermined point on the James, and I decided to accompany the squad sent back with dispatches.

Jesse Takes Prisoners

It was on this trip that Jesse and I had an awkward but rather humorous experience. We had got up within six or eight miles of our lines without much to enliven the journey. The day was hot, and Jesse, accustomed for the last several hours to keep at the head of the troops, would not halt at any roadside pool for even a swallow of water. At last I noticed a stream winding through the deep forest on the left, with a cattle-trail on its bank; and I turned Jesse in to seek a quiet spot to rinse his mouth and water him. He was creeping along, with

the cat-like tread to which I had become so accustomed, and I was lying forward on his neck, dodging the low branches, when a slight movement over my left shoulder caught my eye. Lee had swung his right flank around toward the Mattaponi, and I had ridden right across his picket line, and was headed straight for Libby Prison.

It was one of those crisis in which one does not consult his reasoning faculties, but acts instantly, as instinct or impulse dictates. And here was where my partner, alert and tractable, was to give another exhibition of his pluck and agility. At a hint from my bridle hand he turned short about. Then, instead of trying to escape, which would certainly have cost me my life, he charged, furiously, upon our captors, while I shouted to them to "surrender." There were three men on the "post" and, as I have heard of an Irishman boasting, "I surrounded two of them." One got away. When we marched our two prisoners back to the road and they discovered that they had surrendered to a civilian whose most formidable weapon was a pen, they had what we Methodists are wont to call a "realizing sense" of the truth of the remark that "the pen is mightier than the sword."

Homer Byington, in his *Recollections of an Army Correspondent*, makes the following mention of this affair :

"Mr. Wing came riding into camp with two muskets across the pommel of his saddle and two Confederate captives, one on each side of his horse, as a sort of bodyguard. On inquiring how it came about that he, unarmed and unaided, had thus captured two armed rebel soldiers, Wing confessed that it was only a successful case of the coolest kind of 'bluff.' He was much applauded at Grant's headquarters for his cool-headed courage and sagacious strategy."

In the above, Mr. Byington makes no allowance for the essential part borne by my brave and quick-witted comrade in the little comedy, nor for the excellent good fortune that has so frequently come to my aid in emergencies, and to which I am so much indebted.

A Ride for Life

On the afternoon of Friday, May 20, I rode out to Fredericksburg to attend to some business, and decided to spend the night there. I put Jesse up at a sanitary commission stable, and sought out a quiet corner for myself in a neighboring garret.

At the break of day I was aroused by a heavy cannonading at the front. I rushed out to the stable, threw the saddle upon Jesse's shoulders and raced toward the scene of battle, twelve miles away. I was provoked at myself for having been literally "caught napping" when a fight was pending, and my vexation was increased by the suspicion that I was the only Tribune man available, the others having taken advantage of the last few days' quiet to visit the North.

The morning was cool and the road unencumbered by trains; the roar of the battle inspired us, and Jesse swept through forests and past open fields and quiet farmsteads in a long, unfaltering stride. We soon neared the scene of conflict, and I checked his gait, as we ascended a low hill, the brow of which would give us our first view of the struggle. On reaching the summit a sight presented itself that challenged all our resources of prudence and courage: before us, on the open plain, the two hostile forces were contending for the very road upon which we were approaching. I formed an immediate opinion of the situation: that the enemy had moved upon our right flank and turned it, an attempt that had been made, and successfully met, but a few days previously.

We must get instantly inside our lines or be cut off entirely, and I decided to ride leisurely down the road, so as not to draw particular attention to ourselves, till we got fairly under fire, and then to take my chances in a wild dash for cover behind our firing lines. I had hardly started to execute this design, however, when a new development of the situation forced me to abandon it. Swinging around from the Confederate left, a mass of gray cavalry were advancing, at a brisk trot, with the evident intention of reaching our rear, while their infantry made this diversion in their favor. They were not more than half the distance that we were from the point where the road led into our battle-line, but they must advance across fields encumbered with fences and ditches, while a straight open path lay before Jesse. We made a bold dash for the extreme right flank of that blue line. As we came into full view they rushed to intercept us. I gave Jesse his head and leaned forward in the saddle, in a natural, involuntary effort to push him into a higher speed. We rushed toward a vortex, filled with glittering sabers, and I whispered into his ear, "Jesse, my brave boy, all depends on you now." There was no response now, no glance of recognition,

no turning of his eye back upon his master. Every faculty, every organ of sense, every muscle and nerve and sinew was strained now to reach that little flag waving us a welcome from our sturdy battle line. With long, low, steady stride, with neck outstretched until his nostrils snuffed the dust, straight to where those jaws of glistening steel were closing in upon us, straight past them, within a hundred yards of the leading file he bore me to safety. I dismounted and put my arms about my comrade's neck and kissed his long, clean, bony face, and he responded with a look of pride and affection.

I do not know why we were not fired upon; in which case nothing but our usual good fortune (later I have designated it a "good Providence") could have saved us; but I think this squadron hoped to surprise our troops and, for that reason, withheld their fire. As a matter of history the assault failed, a section of a field battery having previously been posted to prevent such a disaster.

Still Pushing to the Front

I found that the whole army had left except this Sixth Corps, which was to cover the movement and to follow. I could get no forage for Jesse; and, indeed, I was anxious to overtake the general headquarters and get information of the proceedings; so I immediately remounted and pressed forward. We struggled on, over a road filled with troops and trains, past the Ninth Corps and into the Fifth. Here I found Grant, with Meade and Warren. And here I got my first reliable information regarding affairs: Hancock had started, about midnight, for Bowling Green, with instructions to force a passage of the Mattapony before Lee could intercept him. The rest of the army was following for his support, and with an evident purpose to penetrate still further into the hostile country.

With the prospect of an engagement I knew that my place was at the very extreme front, and so we pushed on South. We soon passed the van of the Fifth Corps, and travelled, for an hour or more, without overtaking a single soldier. How far ahead Hancock was I could not guess, and Jesse's steady pace was adding mile upon mile to the open road behind me, and, as I discovered over the ridge to the west a cloud of dust which marked the advance of the enemy in his race for the Mattapony, I became anxious for my favorite Second Corps lest they might be cut off and overwhelmed by superior numbers. Finally I met a

number of Hancock's staff riding back to "hunt up" Warren. A half hour later I reached Bowling Green, where Hancock had taken a strong position and was waiting for the others.

Here were Mr. Coffin, of the Boston Journal, and Mr. Peters, of the Philadelphia Enquirer, who were so kind as to furnish me with a few brief items of information. It was now mid-afternoon of a Saturday, and, by starting immediately, I might get my dispatches to Bell Plain, for transmission to Washington in time for the Monday morning Tribune. I tried to get a relay here, to leave my good horse until my return, but was almost glad when I failed, and I promised him a good rest and feed when we should reach Fredericksburg.

Farewell to a Faithful Friend

The trip to Fredericksburg was without accident or adventure. A good-natured Negro directed me across to the turnpike from Richmond to that city—a broad, hard road, over which I was afterward to regret that I had not urged Jesse into a little faster gait. It was after dark when we reached the quiet town; and I rode straight to the stables, where I had promised Jesse food and rest and the best of care. But, as we passed into the light, a glance at the clock showed the hour of 8.50, and no one was allowed to cross the bridge over the Rappahannock after nine o'clock at night. I wheeled Jesse instantly and started for the river. My good fairy must have held the clock hands, while the guard, with provoking deliberation, examined my pass and, with manifest suspicion, scrutinized my honest face (I could look honest when I tried), for I got away just as the sergeant called, "Nine o'clock; let no one pass."

From the sentry at the east end of the bridge I learned that Fredericksburg was practically deserted, and that Bell Plain was being evacuated. He gave me a crumb of comfort: I was the only quill-driver who had crossed that day, except an Associated Press messenger. This man had gone on in the forenoon and, of course, had no news from the advance columns.

I dismounted and walked up the Falmouth Hills by the side of my faithful friend. I was in a pretty serious mood. I recalled the winter's day when I was borne up that same steep hill on a stretcher, by two stalwart men, to be put aboard a railroad train for Aquia Creek, while behind me, in long, shallow trenches, lay the bodies of almost every best friend.

I walked on for a mile or so in this reflective mood, and then mounted and gave Jesse the reins. I had not the heart to urge him, but he settled into a quick, cheerful walk. It was a clear, cool, moonlight night. The road, as some of my readers may remember, passed over an undulating country. On the ridges the eye swept over a broad landscape, upon which, even to its extreme margin, every object seemed lifted by the mellow moonlight into bold relief, while the valleys were draped in mysterious shadows and filled with a silence that a whisper would startle. Jesse walked briskly forward, his quick ears in constant motion and his eyes peering at every object that we passed. He evidently knew that we were in a country abandoned by our troops and infested by roving bands of guerrillas. I had been so accustomed to these displays of vigilance and alertness, in our solitary journeys, that I thought but little of them then, but afterward I was certain that I had never before known him to be so alert and circumspect.

I was myself haunted with a painful apprehension of evil. This section of Virginia had a reputation for murder and pillage equaled only by that about Fairfax. My horse, that had more than once saved me from capture, was too completely exhausted to be depended upon, and I myself was almost overcome with fatigue and hunger. I must confess that this night, more than ever before or since, my gloomy recollections, my solitude and a sense of my defenseless condition came the nearest to breaking down my courage and self-command.

“Captured”

It was while in this unfortunate frame of mind that, in a dark ravine, a hand seized Jesse's bridle, a pistol was thrust into my face, and I was commanded to give up my arms. I had none. “Get down!” I obeyed, but I instantly grappled with my captor. In the mad scramble and clinch, the pistol was discharged, and I heard a quick trampling of feet. Then the ruffian caught me by the throat, in a deadly grip. I came to lying in a dog-tent with the kindly face of a Union soldier bent over me. The quizzical expression on that face turned my tragedy into a ridiculous and provoking farce. We had been “captured” by a camp guard for a squad of dismounted Union cavalymen who, overtaken by the night in this inhospitable country, had sought refuge till morning in this sheltered spot. These people were certain that I could not reach the river. The country was

full of bush-whackers. Five men of this command had gone forward at nightfall to escort a straggling ambulance and had not returned. They had probably got through, but had not ventured back, lest they might fall into some ambush and be shot or captured. But I was determined to go on, to reach Bell Plain before the last boat should leave, for this might be the only chance for several days to get dispatches through. We waited for Jesse to munch a mouthful of oats that Peters had given him at Bowling Green, and for me to take the kinks out of my wind-pipe with a gulp of hot coffee, and then we started on.

The Horrors of War

I think we had been on our way for an hour, through an absolute solitude. We were ascending a steep and rugged hill. The road was narrow, being cut through heavy clay, and was badly washed with recent rains. By the light of the moon, that had climbed up to the zenith, I was watching Jesse and admiring his skill as he picked his way along the stones and ruts. Presently he lifted his head and gave a quick gasp of alarm. I lifted my eyes to a most ghostly and sickening sight: An ambulance, from which the wheels had been removed, lay in the middle of the road. The pole had been lashed to the dashboard, and from the end there dangled the lifeless body of a patriot soldier. Four more corpses lay on the ground and three in the wagon—a cavalry sergeant (hanging) and four privates, two lieutenants of infantry (in the ambulance) and the driver. That was the occasion when both of us were on the verge of a collapse; Jesse trembling in every fiber, as I led him past, and I sick and faint with loathing and dread. It was several moments before we recovered our equanimity; indeed, I am not sure that I have been the same creature since, for that taught me that there is a limit to a man's fortitude and endurance.

Our journey from there to the river was interrupted by but one slight episode. About three miles before we reached our destination, we came to a large barn, or tobacco store-house in which was a dim light. Twelve or fifteen horses stood outside and there was a babel of loud voices within. I think Jesse detected them before I did, for he assumed the stealthy air and silent, cat-like tread for which I so highly prized him. He crept by, without the faintest click of a hoof upon the hard road-bed, and the revels of the band were undisturbed.

We reached the landing at half past one o'clock in the morning, and we found that we were none too early, as the last steamer was just casting off her lines. I consigned my packet of news to the clerk, and she swung out into the stream and started on her way.

Out of a Tight Place

As I stood on the pier and watched her receding lights, I realized how desperate was my situation. Before me was a raging river, bearing away my last chance of protection or escape, while behind me was a country full of blood and cruelty. I walked gloomily to the shore, where my true-hearted friend gave me an affectionate greeting. As I gazed into his brave face, I knew I had a companion who could be trusted unto death—yes, I was certain that, if need be, he would lay down his life for his master. In a dilapidated stable I found a wisp of fresh fodder, so I slipped the bit from his lips and led him in. I dared not unsaddle him, lest I might have to mount in an instant. I then lay down at the threshold and, with both ears and one eye open, caught, not the proverbial “forty,” but about thirty-nine winks of refreshing sleep.

The safest hour to be abroad, in hostile territory, is at the dawn, and Jesse and I were a long way on our return journey when the sun rose that Sabbath morning. The midnight revelers were “in the arms of Morpheus” (or more likely, Bacchus); the ambulance had been visited and the bodies stripped; the little bivouac was deserted, and while the country was covered with traces of disorder, we came over the whole journey without sight of a single human being.

At six o'clock Jesse was back in his stall at Fredericksburg. I slipped off the saddle, that he had borne continuously for twenty-six hours, and in which he had carried his partner over seventy-three Virginia miles. I gave the dusky hostler a “green-back,” with orders for my horse; a hearty breakfast, a thorough grooming, and, at noon, a light dinner. I took a good meal for a soporific and crept back into my nest under the roof.

In Quest of an Army

At half past two in the afternoon we turned our faces down the Richmond turnpike, in quest of our advancing army. Jesse was in the best of spirits and was inclined to hasten forward, but the afternoon was warm, and I did not care to have him get heated, and so I kept him, mile after mile, at a walk. He

fretted under the restraint, and I got vexed at his willfulness; and thus, in a sort of sulky mood, we dallied along the quiet road. It was six o'clock when we reached Bowling Green. Here I had my first disappointment in not overtaking the army. And the disappointment increased to real anxiety when I was told that the last of the troops passed there early that morning. I was not in a very cheerful mood when I left this little hamlet. Grant certainly would not tarry at the Mattapony; and beyond that—miles and miles beyond—were the James and Richmond. Reaching Milford, I found my conjectures verified. Our troops had swept over the quite formidable defenses of the enemy here and had pressed forward toward the South. We followed, now at our best speed, over a road strewn with the debris of the pursued and the pursuing armies. The nearer we approached our lines the greater our peril from Confederate cavalry hanging upon our rear; but we must overtake our troops before nightfall; so, with all possible circumspection, but with hardly our usual caution, we kept on our way.

Thus perhaps for an hour, when a fork in the road, with about equal prints of travel, caused us to pause. At my beck a Negro in a near-by field came cautiously forward. When I told him that I was one of Horace Greeley's boys, his face beamed with friendly interest. (This was a familiar and effective trick of mine, for I had discovered that there were two persons whom the Negroes held in almost equal reverence and affection—Abraham Lincoln and Horace Greeley—though they invariably called the last-named "Horse Squealer.") From him I learned that both armies—the gray and the blue—had gone streaming down those roads, that the last to pass, only a few minutes previously, were "critter" soldiers (horsemen) of "Lincum's" army. These had taken the right-hand road, perhaps a half hour previously, and I had wasted twice that time in a silly quarrel with my faithful friend.

It was a corduroy road, over which a sensible horse, like Jesse, would travel with the utmost care, lest he sprain or break a limb, so our progress was necessarily slow; but at last, on a slight ridge in front, I discerned a line of rifle-pits and breathed a sigh of relief at the sight, in the twilight, of the dear old flag, waving me a joyous welcome. We halted here at a pool by the roadside, and I dismounted and rinsed Jesse's mouth and sopped his beautiful pointed ears and splashed his shapely legs. Then I took his face in my hands and told him how dearly I prized

him and how sorry I was for being peevish and ugly toward him, and he lifted his bright eyes to mine, and we were reconciled. I can realize now that we were under a weird spell of impending peril. As I rehearsed to him the familiar story of a clean, cool stall, with fragrant straw for a bed, of fresh, bright, wholesome fodder, of rest and recreation and fellowship awaiting him in my New England home when the cruel war should be over, I felt a presentiment that it was an idle dream. And it was a dream, from which we were to receive a sudden awakening. That black pool in the forest was to be the final trysting-place between my true-hearted comrade and myself.

A Goodbye Kiss

This story is nearly done. And although through all the narrative I have been approaching these last sentences my hand hesitates to set them down. I started forward, leading Jesse by a slack rein, when a shot from the hill in front startled me. I waved my handkerchief as a signal of friendliness, when a veering of the wind disclosed the stars and bars. We crept back out of range, and then I mounted to retreat. The Negro, I doubt not unintentionally, had sent us on the wrong road. I settled myself in the saddle and gave Jesse his head. His tread was as noiseless as a panther's as he slid along under the shadows of the forest. The task now was to reach that fork in the road before we were overtaken or intercepted, but that was not to be. Turning a gentle curve, we almost collided with a file of gray cavalymen. Jesse did not wait for any signal, but "quicker than a weaver's shuttle"—as quick as the eccentric on a flying locomotive—he turned and flew back down the road.

I knew it was a hopeless race. The narrow road was flanked, on either side, by a ditch filled with sluggish water; all about us was a dismal swamp; before us was a Confederate line of infantry; behind us, crowding close behind us, was a squad of gray cavalry. No feat of bravado, no dash of speed, could save us both. My only hope now was in abandoning my faithful friend. I checked his gait, and, leaning forward, gave him a kiss and a parting pat on his princely neck. I stepped to the ground and commanded him to "go." He did not move. Our pursuers were upon us. "Good bye, Jesse," I whispered, and then he understood: his very faithfulness was betraying his master. He bounded forward and I slipped into the shadows. As the troop went by I caught a glimpse of the kind, frank, wholesome

face of the leader, which gave assurance that Jesse's future master would appreciate his worth and care for his welfare. That was the final parting between me and one of the brightest, bravest, most constant and chivalrous of the associates of a long life.

As for myself, through that long night, most of the time in water to the waist, often to the chin, I worked my way eastward by the light of the moon, and it was long after sunrise when I fell in with our rear guard—the Second Maine Cavalry. And about that time the people of the North, at their breakfast tables, were scanning my dispatch from Bowling Green, and thinking what a "soft snap" the chap who sent it had, lolling about headquarters and exempt, as a non-combatant, from the ordinary perils and hardships of army life.

South Norwalk, Conn.

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